

CHILDREN OF THEIR FATHERS

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particularly towards adults. Anyone who has brought up children however knows that they are unhappy with unlimited licence in behaviour, and is aware that the learning of etiquette and manners and obedience, apparently so tiresome in its early stages, does eventually eliminate a number of perplexing choices for children, and by regulating certain relationships confers freedom in other directions. That was my reading of the Ngoni children's reactions to the somewhat formal code of manners taught from their early years and strictly enforced. Ngoni good manners did not mean that the children were coerced and subdued. They were happy, busy, friendly, helpful, endlessly inventive and full of initiative. I suggested here and there in the book that they had various outlets in the middle years of childhood for aggression, jealousy, frustration. There was very little evidence of neurotic tendencies, and, except in certain instances mentioned, there was little apparent inclination to avoid social mixing with age-mates or with other groups and the obligations inherent in such mixing.

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The seeming absence of frustration and overt rebellion in the years just after puberty was due to the social recognition by relatives and by the village community of the new stage reached by boys and girls, and to the increasing responsibility required of them for carrying out allotted tasks and for preparing for their future careers. There was no doubt that the outlet for youths of emigration from the villages to work for wages in the south provided a much-needed opportunity at a critical moment in their late teens. In the same way the stimulus of modern schooling, depending on the area and the type of schools in it, helped older boys and girls to look forward to further opportunities of work, of interests, and of escape from the too intimate control of their family and kinship circle and village elders.

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Another line to be followed in these growing-up studies is the actual pattern of relationships between the parents and the children, the parents and their circle of relatives, the

591 that is, in uxorilocal marriage. In the man's village there are likely
602 to be relatives of his wife already established, but it is she who is
said to 'follow' her husband to the village and not he who 'follows'
her, since his ties to the village, and to the cluster in the village
within which they set up their household, are stronger than hers.
Similarly a man may have relatives of his own living in his wife's
village and yet be spoken of as living uxorilocally. If a woman's
father is living in her village, he will be the focus of her husband's
obligations. But if he lives a long way away and the woman has
been dependent on her grandparents, or on her mother's brother,
then it is they who will act towards her husband to some extent in
[606] the role of substitute parents-in-law. However, a man does not
avoid his substitute mother-in-law as thoroughly as he would his
wife's own mother.

606 The obligation on a man to help his wife's parents in their garden
583 is expressed in two ways. Once during the marriage the man
must provide a party of people to hoe for the greater part of one
day in his wife's mother's garden. He must also be prepared to
work in this garden from time to time when he is called upon, and
his wife may work with him. While the labour given by the man
and his wife is useful labour, the work done by the hoeing party is
only partly useful and may do more damage than good. The
procedure is that the man, or a relative of his, tells his father-in-law
that he proposes to bring a party to hoe on such-and-such a day.
By agreeing to this the father-in-law tacitly agrees also to provide
the party with beer and presents. On the appointed day, early in
the morning, the party arrives and begins work. When the father-
in-law thinks the work has gone on long enough, he sends an
intermediary to offer a present to the leader of the hoers. If the
present is considered sufficient the party stops hoeing and returns to
the father-in-law's village. If not, it continues to hoe with renewed
vigour. At intervals the father-in-law sends intermediaries with
higher and higher offers until at last the hoers are satisfied or
exhausted and they come into the village to collect their presents and
beer. As often as not the hoers try to force the father-in-law to
offer a present at the limit of his resources, for example a beast, and,
as the offers mount, the workers become more and more excited and
their hoeing less and less useful. At the end of a day, with the light
failing, physically exhausted hoers begin to root up the maize with
the weeds, and the mother-in-law's garden may be seriously damaged.
If the father-in-law is obstinate and does not offer them what they
want the hoers may spend the night sleeping out in the garden.
By the next morning everyone is too tired to continue the matter
further, and the party disperses.¹¹

[154] This sort of hoeing party may not facilitate the cultivation of good
maize but it is of great significance to the married couple and the

¹¹ See Appendix III for an account of two of these parties.

two groups of relatives. In the partial destruction of the father-in-law's crop by the man's friends, the latent hostility between the two groups is canalized into a form that is just socially acceptable. In the later stages of hoeing the men and women in the party act wildly, dance round and round anyone who tries to interfere with them and throw earth all over them. At first all contact between the father-in-law and the leader of the party is through intermediaries, and if all goes well, and there is no crisis, the father-in-law will always remain in the background. But, with rising tempers the tension increases, and the father-in-law may himself go to cajole and threaten the party. When they do decide to stop and go into the village, an attempt is made to establish peaceful relations again, and the leader of the party begins to protest that they never really intended holding out for such a large present, that they knew it was getting dark and that they could not hoe at night. They settle down to drink the beer provided by the father-in-law and in the morning go back to their own village. It is significant that the man himself cannot be the leader of the party, so that he does not come into direct contact with his father-in-law. He shelters behind the party leader, so that the chances of an open breach between him and his father-in-law are lessened.

The formalized expression of hostility, which is a feature of many Ngoni ceremonies,¹² appears most clearly in marriage in the custom of the hoeing party, but is present in some other situations, as in the instruction of the bride at the gall bladder ceremony, when she is sometimes told she has a bad character, is mean and deceitful. Even the carrying of beer can be used to express hostility, as is indicated by Reuben's remark towards the end of his son-in-law's hoeing party, that he would tell his wife to brew beer and send it to his son-in-law's village, where the women bringing beer would demand a present even greater than the one demanded by the leader of the hoers.¹³

Men and women wish their daughters to bear children, and are reluctant to marry them to impotent men. Yet childbirth is hazardous, and a woman may die in labour because of her adultery or the adultery of her husband. It is important, therefore, that a woman's parents should be informed whenever she becomes pregnant, lest the woman die and her parents hear of her death without being forewarned of the danger. It is not sufficient that the woman's parents should hear from others that their daughter is pregnant. She must go to them on a special visit to tell them the news herself. This formal notification takes place every time she is pregnant, but if, when she becomes pregnant for the first time, she is living in

¹² For another example, see the installation of the headman's deputy described in Gluckman, Mitchell and Barnes, 'The village headman in British Central Africa', *Africa*, xix (1949), pp. 100-106.

¹³ See Appendix III, p. 131.